

relations across the generations. If the internet allows us to make endless connections with others, these are typically fast moving and lacking the warmth, empathy and depth of association that is historically signified by family, community and knowing others in place and over time.

This emerging revolution in the way we live, produce and distribute is inseparable from the global market. It has affected our relationships and feeling for others. And crucially from the standpoint of our relation to the world of nature, it has enhanced the principle of expansion, put in place by historical capitalism, of resource, land and water use, and of population and economic growth. Not only has it exhausted the availability of natural resources but also the viability of the planet taken for granted by Homo sapiens for 10,000 years.

The weak defence of the publishing and printing industries has no future while these expansive forms of social development are taken for granted, as Labor well knows. It was not all that long ago that the community came out in support of the Maritime Union of Australia and 'won' the battle against dismantling long-established conditions on the wharfs only to see this 'victory' dissolve as technology decimated the workforce. Any real defence needs to be put as part of a larger perspective, where the full implications of a combination of new global technologies and capitalism are assessed.

Opposition to the material force of the global market is beginning to emerge, grounded in a view of the material consequences of a way of life now visibly unsustainable. Such opposition needs to include a substantial defence of the social circumstances of writers and intellectuals, publishers and printers, as an aspect of constructing a way forward for Australia and the Australian people. For a generation our intellectual culture has been overly slanted towards global economy and culture. Can it broaden its perspectives in the defence of a social world of reading, writing and publishing based in the renewal of local and regional cultures? ←

To what degree should the economy and culture of the nation be made-over by global markets in the pursuit of global imports and exports and a global way of life? Rather than being a matter of how books will be priced, the issues around parallel importation laws potentially raise far more basic questions of how we are to live over the coming decades.

Norway's

Sámi Parliament

Jane Robbins

A model for Indigenous representation?

On September 14th two elections were held in Norway. One was for the national government and the other was for the Sámediggi, or Sámi Parliament, the representative body for Norway's Indigenous minority, the Sámi. In due course the King of Norway, Harald V, will open the next session of the Storting or Parliament. Shortly after, wearing the same regalia and with much the same pomp and circumstance, he will open the Sámediggi in its impressive building in the town of Karasjok (Kárášjohka) in the Arctic Circle and the heart of Sámi territory. The symbolism of this parallel ceremony is just one of many ways in which the Norwegians acknowledge the

importance of the status of the Sámi representative body within the political system.

The Sámediggi has been in existence since 1989 and since that time its responsibilities have increased considerably. Today it administers a budget of over \$50 million (NOK 250 million), which is roughly half the amount spent on Sámi programs by the Norwegian government. While its original powers were modest, they have gradually expanded. The Sámediggi manages the Sámi Development Fund, which allocates funding to Sámi organisations; it has responsibility for language and cultural heritage preservation, protection of heritage sites and for the development of teaching aids to support education. In 2000 a NOK 70 million fund was established by the government as compensation for former assimilation policies; the Sámediggi allocates grants for cultural and linguistic activities from the interest generated. In 2005 the Finnmark Act acknowledged the traditional rights of the Sámi to land and water in Finnmark County in the north of Norway.

There are many parallels between the role and function of

the Sámediggi and the former Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). However, the positive approach of the Norwegian government to a popularly elected Indigenous representative body is in contrast to the experience in Australia, where ATSIC was frequently at loggerheads with government, especially in the last few years of its existence. The Howard government's verdict that ATSIC was a failure has become popular wisdom. Interestingly, the lack of a separation of powers (that is, ATSIC's ability both to make policy and approve expenditure) is now commonly believed to be at the heart of its shortcomings. It was also widely seen as unaccountable both to government and to its Indigenous constituents. These assumptions have been perpetuated by the current Labor government, which made it clear that its endorsement of the current process to establish a new Australian

Indigenous representative body was conditional on it not being 'another ATSIC'. This has been understood to mean that the new body should not be popularly elected nor should it have any direct control over expenditure. It is interesting in this context to consider why the Norwegians appear to be happy with their arrangements which embrace these roles and indeed wish to endorse the independent status of their Indigenous representative body.

The Sámi and Australia's Indigenous peoples share a common legal difficulty in achieving recognition of their political claims within the modern nation. Historically, neither were offered treaties by the colonising powers that assumed their territories. In the case of the Sámi (or Lapps as they have been called), this occupation took place over many centuries as people from the south and east moved into Sámi territory in the northern regions of

Fennoscandia. The consolidation of contemporary national borders left Sámi territory divided between Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. No one is sure how many Sámi there are, but it is estimated that there are between 50,000 and 70,000, with the majority—probably around 40,000—in Norway. They are commonly known as nomadic reindeer herders of the arctic north, but in fact Sámi communities historically pursued a variety of lifestyles including fishing and hunting and trapping as well as reindeer husbandry. As in Australia, Norwegian Sámi suffered from discriminatory government policy in the first part of the 20th century—education was only provided in Norwegian language and many children were placed in boarding schools in an active attempt to 'Norwegianise' their culture. The government supported settlers to move onto Sámi lands, especially in the north, where this policy had defence implications. As non-

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Norwegians, Sámi also experienced restrictions in purchasing land.

Sámi relations with the Norwegian began to change immediately after World War II. Retreating German troops applied a 'scorched earth policy' in northern Finnmark and Troms regions, with dire consequences for the Sámi. In a short period of time three quarters of the Sámi population in Norway lost their homes, boats and other material possessions. Government aid and reconstruction followed and this, for many Sámi families, was the first positive interaction with the Norwegian state. The extension of welfare benefits and other social services to Sámi communities also occurred during this period, although this was not accompanied by any recognition of cultural rights. Interestingly, the most important turning point in Sámi/Norwegian relations occurred in the 1980s as the result of a dam project. The Alta-Kautokeino dam was approved by the Norwegian parliament in 1978 to provide hydro-electricity. The proposed site would flood important reindeer grazing areas and harm traditional salmon fisheries. As in Australia's Franklin Dam case, Indigenous activists joined with environmentalists to protest against the dam, resulting in some of the most dramatic civil unrest ever witnessed in Norway. In 1981, 600 police in riot gear forcibly removed protesters who had chained themselves together. In the capital, in scenes reminiscent of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, Sámi erected a traditional lavvu, or tent, in front of the Storting and began a series of hunger strikes. Such scenes are rarely seen in the peaceable Norwegian society. The case went to the Supreme Court, which over-ruled objections, but an important step had been taken—the Sámi had become politically visible, perhaps for the first time, and the Norwegian national conscience had been pricked. As a result several official committees were established to consider Sámi cultural and legal rights and these led to the Sámi Act of 1987, the recognition of Sámi in the Norwegian Constitution and the establishment of the Sámediggi in 1989.

An interesting contrast to Australian experience of Indigenous representation is the involvement of political parties in Norwegian Sámi elections. This practice has been encouraged by the fact that the Executive Council and President are chosen, Westminster style, Robbins, E.J., 2009. Norway's Sami parliament. *Arena Magazine*, 103, 9-11. Copyright 2009 Arena Publications. Published version of the paper reproduced here with permission from the publisher. Available at <http://www.arena.org.au/>

on the basis of majority support. Party 'lists' form the basis of political campaigns, together with loose groupings of individuals. Mainstream parties such as the Labour Party have a Sámi counterpart while others are based on Sámi organisations such as the Norwegian Sámi Association (NSR) and regional Reindeer Herders' Associations. The NSR has been the dominant party in the Sámediggi, governing with either a majority in its own right, or in association with minor parties. Two years after the 2005 election its coalition with minor parties broke down allowing the Labour Party, led by Egil Olli, to form a governing alliance with minor parties for the first time. Registration for voting is voluntary and is open to anyone who identifies as a Sámi and either speaks the Sámi language or has a parent, grandparent or great-grand-parent who spoke

Sámi. In the 2005 election, voter turnout was 73 per cent and women won a majority of seats.

In the recent election the campaigns of two previously unrepresented parties attracted considerable interest. The Progress Party (FrP) is a major right-wing force in the Norwegian Parliament and has been outspoken in its opposition to the Sámi Parliament, labelling it discriminatory and undemocratic and portraying Sámediggi funding activities as racially based 'privileges'. The FrP campaign for the Sámi elections was highly publicised and controversial, with speculation that it reflected the views of conservative Sámi who are uncomfortable with the language of rights and separatism. At the other extreme was another newcomer, Årja, a party which promotes Sámi self-determination with a focus on

the Sámi settler communities in inner Finnmark. Årja campaigned for hunting rights and liberalisation of the use of snowmobiles and quad bikes—a hot environmental issue in the north. The September elections saw both of these parties win 3 seats each at the expense of the major parties. Negotiations resulted in a majority coalition of Labour, Årja and 3 single-seat parties forming a government, with Egil Olli of the Sámi Labour Party continuing his presidency and Årja's tertiary educated young female leader, Laila Susanne Vars, becoming the vice-president. Under this Coalition it is predicted that opportunities for economic or resource development in Sámi regions will be considered more favourably than in past regimes, which prioritised reindeer herders' interests. The reduced support for the major parties in favour of the smaller parties has

been seen as voter protest against the lack of differentiation between Labour and NSR platforms and dissatisfaction with past policy decisions.

The dynamic of party politics in the Sámediggi offers an interesting contrast to the experience of ATSIC. The ATSIC commissioners were chosen through a process in which began with voters electing local representatives for Regional Councils. The Regional Councils were then grouped into zones for the purpose of electing a commissioner to the national board, rather than an executive being chosen on the basis of majority support by elected representatives. This was done to create a strong model of regionalism, but such a system also emphasised geographical equality of representation at national level, as opposed to the development of 'issues' based platforms, and produced a national board of commissioners who shared no intrinsic strategic outlook. It is not surprising that ATSIC election campaigns were conducted almost exclusively on a personal leadership basis rather than on policy issues. It might be hard to accept that ATSIC could have benefited from the development of parties as there is a common perception that it was already 'too political'. While we know from mainstream politics how frustrating parties can be, they do at least offer a rudimentary tool for communication between the voters and their representatives and provide a basis for a policy debate to emerge. Sámi voters have used their election opportunity to send a message to their representatives in the Sámediggi that a change is required.

It is interesting to speculate why the Norwegian government has encouraged the expansion of the responsibilities and the independence of the Sámi Parliament. This is probably because it has come to interpret Sámi rights within the framework of international treaty obligations, as a matter of human rights. Unlike Australia it has signed ILO Convention No 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, as

well as the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. However, article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights has perhaps been the most influential determinant of Norwegian Sámi policy, a document to which Australia is also a signatory. Article 27 states:

In those states in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or use their own language.

It also contains protections against discrimination for these groups. Norway has embraced these articles and is developing a genuine partnership with the Sámi in the governance of cultural and heritage matters. It is now beginning to expand its partnership with the Sámi to economic and resource management. While there has been some evidence of dissent within Norwegian society regarding these developments, in comparison to the native title debate in Australia there seems to be relatively little controversy. Norway has also embedded recognition of the Sámi in its Constitution. It will be interesting to observe whether the current Australian debate on the adoption of a Human Rights Act will encourage the development of similar perspective on Indigenous rights in this country. ←

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